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Bill 25-08

Emergency Medical Services Transport Fee – Imposition

Testimony of Fire Chief Tom Carr

Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service

Public Hearing

July 8, 2008

Good evening. I am Fire Chief Tom Carr. I have served the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service for over 35 years. I have served as a volunteer as well as a career member of this department and have served through many critical periods of growth. My experience has allowed me to provide fire as well as Emergency Medical Service to our citizens including Advanced Life Support (ALS) as a paramedic during early development of the ALS program in the county. I am here before you now as the Fire Chief of the Nation's most progressive combination fire and rescue system that is at yet another critical point in our growth and development

The proposed legislation, Bill 25-08, is the only viable solution to the resource challenges presented to me as the Fire Chief. Montgomery County is growing exponentially and with that comes a greater need for response and infrastructure resources. I am charged with being a good steward of the recently procured fire apparatus valued at \$32 million. The Apparatus Management Plan which Council approved in 2004 is currently without funding. The EMST Fee will provide that funding, preventing MCFRS from having to come back to the citizens again in 10 years to replace an entire fleet once again. Our response times are increasing as is the population we serve. Baby Boomers are now entering into the years where they will require more Emergency Medical Service. County growth has also brought the need to build additional fire stations with four currently under way and three more under consideration. I am also charged, as the County's first Fire Chief, with maintaining the integrity of our robust volunteer system. The EMST Fee will allow the additional financial resources needed as incentives for the LFRD's to do so. Finally, as a measure to enhance available ALS resources and provide a safer work environment for all MCFRS members, we must continue to build out the four person staffing plan utilizing career and volunteer personnel.

We have, as I see it, limited options. First, which is not an option in my opinion, is to ignore our challenges and hope these needs go away. That is not going to happen. Second, we raise taxes to provide the financial resources needed. This will place a financial burden on all residents of Montgomery County whether they have the means to pay or not. Lastly, we can implement the EMST Fee. There will be no financial impact on residents of Montgomery County, yet it will produce the much needed financial resources for us to meet the challenges of our fire and rescue service. This is money that the insurance companies have already allocated for this service which the County has chosen not to collect.

It is important to understand that County residents will be responsible for the EMST Fee only to the extent of insurance coverage. Insured County residents will not be responsible for co-pays or deductibles. Uninsured County residents will not pay anything.

Many of our surrounding jurisdictions have already imposed EMST Fees, including Fairfax, Arlington, Prince George's, Anne Arundel, and Frederick Counties, the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, and Baltimore, and the District of Columbia. Approximately 4,500 Montgomery County residents pay EMST Fees charged by neighboring jurisdictions each year when they are transported under mutual aid agreements by fire and rescue units operated by other jurisdictions. In contrast, approximately 6,500 non-County residents transported by MCFRS each year are not charged an EMST Fee even though they would be required to pay an EMST fee if they had been transported by fire and rescue units operated by the jurisdictions in which they live.

In order for me to lead our department, to meet the challenges of a growing, diverse community, I am asking that you support the fire service as you have in the past and pass Bill 25-08. I would be happy to answer any questions, and I look forward to participating in the Public Safety Committee work session on this bill on July 24.